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A Room Of One's Own (Lions Gate Classics Book 1)

Virginia Woolf
A Room of One's Own



A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write

Penguin Books Great Ideas



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Book Information

File Size: 449 KB

Print Length: 148 pages

Publisher: Penguin; Rev Ed edition (September 2, 2004)

Publication Date: September 2, 2004

Sold by:Â Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B003P9XDMK

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #97,501 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #39 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Nonfiction > Politics & Social Sciences > Women's Studies > Feminist Theory #100 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Literature & Fiction > Essays & Correspondence > Essays #126 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Literature & Fiction > Anthologies & Literature Collections > Classics

Customer Reviews

In 1928, Virginia Woolf was asked to speak on the topic of "women and fiction". The result, based upon two papers she delivered to literary societies at Newnham and Girton in October of that year, was "A Room of One's Own", an extended essay on women as both writers of fiction and as characters in fiction. And, while Woolf suggests that, "when a subject is highly controversial-and any question about sex is that-one cannot hope to tell the truth," her essay is, in fact, an extraordinarily even-handed, thoughtful and perceptive reflection on the topic. Woolf begins with a simple and enigmatic opinion: "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction; and

that, as you will see, leaves the great problem of the true nature of woman and the true nature of fiction unresolved." From this spare beginning, Woolf deftly explores the difference between how women had been portrayed in fiction, and how they actually lived in the world, during the preceding centuries. "A very queer, composite being emerges. Imaginatively, she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was a slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger." The source of dissonance between how women were portrayed in fiction, and how they actually lived, was the fact that most fiction prior to the nineteenth century was written by men. As Woolf astutely points out, "[i]t was strange to think that all the great women of fiction were, until Jane Austen's day, not only seen by the other sex, but seen only in relation to the other sex.

Virginia Woolf is a writer of intelligence and grace. *A Room of One's Own* is a skinny little treasure of a book with words and wisdom that will stay with the reader long after it is read. The essay contained in the book is the result of two papers that Ms. Woolf read to the Arts Society at Newnham and Odtia at Girton (England) in October of 1928. She was asked to speak about the topic of "Women and Fiction", and after doing so, she expanded her papers and later published them as this book. Woolf begins the essay by writing, "I soon saw that [the subject of women and fiction] had one fatal drawback. I should never be able to come to a conclusion. I should never be able to fulfil what is, I understand, the first duty of a lecturer- to hand you after an hour's discourse a nugget of pure truth to wrap up between the pages of your notebooks and keep on the mantelpiece for ever. All I could do was to offer you an opinion upon one minor point- a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction... At any rate, when a subject is highly controversial- and any question about sex is that- one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold. One can only give one's audience the chance of drawing their own conclusions as they observe the limitations, the prejudices, the idiosyncrasies of the speaker." It is in this straightforward and honest manner that Woolf writes about women and fiction. Although the speech was given and the book was published in 1929, all of its points are still important for women- and especially women writers and artists- today.

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